

# THE 'USES' OF THE CENTRAL PARK OR URBAN GARDEN – ANTHROPOLOGY OF URBAN PLACES

## A RESEARCH PROJECT – PLOVDIV, BULGARIA

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The presentation on 2 June 2004 in Plovdiv of the results of our research project *The "uses" of the Central Park or Urban Garden – Anthropology of Urban Places* in front of the students of Ethnology, museum workers, teaching staff and PhD students from the department of Ethnology and Sociology, as well as Denis Cerclet – an invited lecturer, professor in Ethnology from the University Lumier, Lyon 2, France evoked a very fruitful discussion and it was one of our first public results. The topic, the subject and the problems, presented by the project participants became a commonplace, space and center of different reactions – personal memories, additional information, questions and suggestions for the future work.

The project began his own life and we have ideas for its further development in partnership with the Department of Architecture of Municipality of Plovdiv, Museums, Archives and younger students.

From that viewpoint one can say that one of the objectives of the project was completed – the problematic as a research topic was established, the questions were erased and enriched and we have many perspectives for future work. On the other hand, we have opportunities to think about the further development of the topic and research and to find its place in the field of applied anthropology, i.e. to try to trace the links between research and implementation of results as survey of experts.

That was an unexpected result but it fits very well to the contemporary urban situation in Plovdiv, because there is a project for changes of the physical environment of the park, the concept of the park as central urban space and as a topic of a public urban discussion how to "re-shape" the garden.

### How we worked:

Our research was limited by the seasons and we could not use the entire five-months period to complete our fieldwork. We did a participant observation almost during the whole period in order to follow the "life" of the park and activities in the park in different times of the year and day. It allowed us to become more familiar with most of the "inhabitants" in the park. From the beginning we discussed different fields in which every one of the team will stress the efforts, to make the fieldwork and to provide the results.

We researched the problematic on several levels:

- The morphology of the Central park in an ecological manner and its place in the larger context of parks in Plovdiv as referent data;
- Mental maps of different individuals and their activities within the place;
- Observation in different sights in the space of the park;
- Questioned the different groups and individuals "inhabiting" the park from the point of view of the different identities realized there;
- We observed and explored the Park as common urban place and appropriated "own" place for the different communities and groups there – generations, subcultures, groups, based on common activities;

- We collected and analyzed different visual materials and oral narrations in order to explore the different images of the park – public and individual.

To achieve our objectives we combined different methods: participant observation, inquire with 50 different individuals, semi-structured interviews with the people in the park (it was very useful in our meeting with the elder men), free conversations, especially with youth subcultures, analyzing the visual materials – new made by us photos and old ones, editions of TV emissions on the topic, discussions with the people from the State archive – Plovdiv and the director of the Historical Museum Plovdiv who had made three years ago an exhibition – The Parks and Gardens of Plovdiv.

The results from the fieldwork are not translated into English, that is why our CD presentation consists mostly pictures and a short video (non professional) that can be called *One-day walk in the park of Plovdiv*. In our archive we also have video materials from special emissions for the park of the Plovdiv Public TV: *Broenitza and Remember Plovdiv!*.

The following report is a combination from the personal reports of the authors of the project. That is our attempt to present the Park in its ambivalence, mosaic structure, places and artifacts. Our whole research was a big walk in the park – meeting people, enjoying the nature, remembering personal experiences, and learning the previous urban situations. As it was mentioned above, our walk is just starting.

### Preliminary theoretical notes

We choose as a research approach to the park the methodology of the Urban sociology, proposed by Yves Grafmeyer and the school of urban anthropology and sociology in Lyon, Isaak Josef, Jean Remy and Liliane Voyé, who on one hand are very tentative researchers and translators into French of the School of Chicago and adapters and appliers of the different approaches of the classical authors as William Thomas, Robert Ezra Park, Ernest Burgess, Louis Wirth, Robert Redfield and others representatives for the French society. We also use the synthetic approach of Ulf Hannerz how we can “explore the City” giving us different tools and ideas how to penetrate the problematic of the park as a topic of the urban anthropology, anthropology of modern complex societies, anthropology at home and anthropology of spaces, places and communities around one of the central urban places. Talking about the urban park as a public space we has to think in the dichotomies such as public-private, natural cultural/social that directs us towards the sociological tradition of the questions of modern publicity in the terms of H. Arendt J. Habermas, M. Foucault, P. Bourdieu, etc.

### RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

We consider the Central urban park as a central urban public space with its own specific status quo, place in the city, shared space not only by the local population but by the strangers too. It is a place, codified by rule, but which provides opportunities for different “uses” as ways of appropriation of places, as ways of manifestation of different activities and identities and creating of different types of communities. And last, but not the least – we used the diachronic approach on purpose to try to make a genesis of the park in a way of creation of the different images of the park which correspond to the different stages of the development of Bulgarian society, how the park was used in the different discourses of the

local and national governance, how it was and become a place of the common memory and stake of symbolic struggles.

The attempts use to the only one viewpoint are preliminary unsuccessful because of the ambivalence of the park: it is an urban space, but not at all, it is a natural space but not naturally constructed, there are the places, appropriated by different groups and individuals, but, at the same time it belongs to all. We can continue the list with many dichotomies like these and to try to see what stays behind. What are the characteristics of that space that allows its different uses, different images and at least, how the park fits to the urban situation and urban way of life. On one hand, the park is 'proposed' to the local people as a physical space, 'natural' place, but, on the other, it is socially and symbolically constructed and fulfilled with different meanings. This eternal tension between the social and cultural reflects in many theories trying to answer the question what the city is – a system with different actors, a body, an organism, a mosaic structure or network of interactions.

Our research tried to combine some of the approaches and here we are presenting the results in several topics: the Park as a socially constructed space – different images and concepts of the park in a diachronic plan, the park as a morphology – the significant places from the point of view of its 'inhabitants', the sight of the park as appropriated by different communities and groups and the park as a common memorial place – local, national.

One of the main dimensions of the Park, coming from the model of the West-European Park is as a mark of modernity. The sociological line consider the public park as a particular place – result of the division of working and leisure time, coming from the division of the labor. On the other hand, anthropologically said, the Park is a metaphor of the humanized nature in the "artificial" space of the city. In Slavonic languages the "garden" ('gradina') and "the city" ('grad') have one and the same etymological roots.

The images and concepts of the park also were changed during the 20-th century. The Park as an urban place "replaced" the private garden in the era of modern ages after the space of Ottoman Empire. In Plovdiv the process of creating and designing the "human" nature into the City was and is a mark of modernity. The changes are represented even through the changes of the names of the Central urban park – "The garden of Tzar Simeon", "The City Garden" during the socialism and "Tzar Simeon's Garden" again after the changes. The next dimension of the park is The Park as a symbolical capital in Pierre Bourdieu's sense and as a common urban memorial place as well.

## A SHORT HISTORY OF THE PARK

*The park is a gift to citizens of Plovid  
By the Knyaz Ferdinand  
And their own care*

The current Central Urban Park or the Urban Garden is not the first Public Garden in Plovdiv. The first one was created by the idea of Knyaz Donducov-Korsacov – a Russian officer, the first governor of Plovdiv just after the Liberation of Bulgaria in 1878. Till then the only urban gardens in the Ottoman city were private small gardens around the houses,

and the plovdiviots used to go 'in the nature' along the river or in the near Rhodopa mountain.

In 1891 the Bulgarian Government takes a decision to create in Plovdiv the first International fair. The World Exhibition of Paris, marked the 'fin du siècle' two years ago, influenced the spirit of the time. For that purpose the Plovdiv society asked again Lucien Chevalas<sup>1</sup> - to create the garden for the fair. He did it for ten mounts and it became a real garden with a huge lake where the first Bulgarian ship 'Angel Kanchev' was exposed for the exhibition. On the place of the garden there was an old, abandoned Turkish cemetery. The first name of the park was 'Garden of the first World Exhibition of Plovdiv'. In 1892 The Bulgarian ruler – Knyaz Ferdinand with a special law names the Park 'Tzar Simeon' and gives it as a present for the people of Plovdiv with the only condition – to take care of it. The garden was fenced and guarded by the municipality. It became a place for promenade, the city orchestra had concerts every weekend, there was a dancing and it became one of the favorite places for 'plovdivchani' - Plovdiv inhabitants.

There was a period when the park had a zoo area but after a tragic accident the animals were replaced in the Zoo in other park of the city.

The concept of the park as closed space was changed after the World War II, the fence was destroyed, the alleys were asphalted and from 'more natural' it became to be 'more artificial' place.

In the 80-s the lake was reconstructed, there were no boats and swans any more and on their place singing and dancing fountains appeared. The lake with new functions remained a favorite place for the plovdiviots and tourists and every evening during the summer they enjoyed the spectacles with sounds and lights. During the 90's the fountains were 'mute' and the lake was dry and since 4 years after an initiative of the citizens with the aid of municipality they were repaired.

The urban brass orchestra still made concerts for holydays or during the weekends. Since 5 years, by the reason of economies, municipality decided to 'close' the orchestra.

The memorial places started to appear in the park from the very beginning – monuments of national heroes, sculptures as *The Children*, *The Bear* and etc. and during the 90's a new tradition was established – an international open-air plain-air and thus many masterpieces remained in the park.

The very new project of new development of the park is still on the table of the architectures but one of the main tasks is to close again the park in the purpose to be better protected and guarded.

The park was and still is a place for sport activities. During the interwar period there was a kayak championship, variety of marathons and other competitions.

## THE MORPHOLOGY OF THE PARK

The morphology of the park and its 'inhabitants' is presented in the visual part of the report on the cd.

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<sup>1</sup> The architect, invited by the Knyaz Dondukov-Korssakov to create first public gardens in Plovdiv. Before the Bulgarian Liberation he worked in Istanbul as a personal architect of the sultan of the Ottoman Empire. He was born in Switzerland, educated in Paris and the author of some of the best gardens in Europe in that time.

# THE PARK AS AN URBAN SPACE PUBLIC/PRIVATE, NATURAL/SOCIAL (CULTURAL)

## INTRODUCTION

The Central Park of Plovdiv is a typically city space but it has its own specific functions and specific uses. We will consider as ambivalent space consisting definite visions of public and private, of natural and cultural. The norm of the modern anonymous publicity is spread in it and it constitutes it and defines its uses. On the one hand this space is separated from the other city spaces (for example the central city square, the Main Street, the buildings of the institutions) and on the other hand – it alone settles “invisible” boundaries, whose function is to mark the definite sites as playgrounds, fountains, gardens, alleys, lakes, dog area as well as pavilions, cafes and restaurants. It is important to accent on the one hand the main function of the Park – filling the leisure time (in opposition of the working time), and on the other hand – the figures corresponding to this free time.

## THE RELATION “PUBLIC – PRIVATE”

The Central Park is a specific public space as far as it allows each public individual a free access. The public individuals we define as inhabitants of the park or actors who have the sense [or acquaintance] of the proper uses of this space. These uses are supposed by the public norm. The norm itself has the function to make the social beings, our actors, to submit to its ‘rules’ out of question. That is because they exist in their everyday attitude rather than the critical one. The individuals have incorporated the ‘rules’. The meaning of the term ‘rules’ that we consider comes to the point of a behavior that the actors accept as usual, normal. Originally the free access for anyone at any time is guaranteed, but in fact this is not the situation we have in reality. There are ‘shoved out’ individuals whose presence is sanctioned. These are the so-called ‘deviating’ or ‘departures from the public norm’ individuals such as prostitutes, drug addicts, beggars, homeless, thieves etc. They are sanctioned by the anonymous public look, which belongs to everyone and to no one, so everyone is in the meaning of every citizen using the space of the Park properly according to the norm. At the same time, the divagations are sanctioned by the representatives of particular institutions (police officers, county guards). The space of the Park is normed and normative as well, and here it does not make any exception from the rest of the city spaces.

We could outline two essential aspects of how we put the space of the park. It is *open* and *lightened*. These two characteristics guarantee the optimum *visibility* in it.

**First**, the Park is an open space. This concerns the fact that the different seasons affect this space, moreover, the changing of day and night also affects it. Our observations showed that the “rush-hour” of using this space and being in there is the day rather than the night, and the visits are mostly during the summer and the spring rather than the winter.

**Second**, it is open in the meaning of the free access (considered as a principle, not as a practice in fact). The free access as a principle means most generally that everyone is allowed without a requirement of ritual or legitimating his/her personality (as showing an identity card for instance).

**Third**, it is open in the meaning of something uncovered, something that is the opposite of ‘hidden’, something permitted according to everyday practices – because this space is an

everyday one where the sacred does not present and even if we could find a number of “ruins” of symbolic actions (as putting flowers on a memorial), these traces concern the routine acting.

This main characteristic of the Park is important because as a public space it is controlled and observed all the time. Or at least it is supposed to be. Here is the whole ‘system of visibility’ – the lamps, the searchlights, even the torches of the guards patrolling at night. In the Central Park it is impossible to exist places that are not showed, hidden places because they could concentrate the mentioned ‘deviating individuals’.

The Park is individually used. These uses are strongly connected with the publicity and even then they are projections of particular private visions of this space – as far as it is a place for free appearance, free manifestation.

The inhabitants act as in a public space and at the same time as in a private space, but this is not a controversy. Unless the actors “cross the line”, which means the normal limits of the way they act being normal citizens. And as we mentioned above, the limits of the normal acting/normal action are defined through the public norm. Here is our outlook about the constituted ‘degrees of the action’. The behaviors are considered through degrees of ‘normality’, ‘permission’, ‘proper using’ – what is ‘normal’, ‘permitted’ and ‘proper’ in the public sphere.

Here are two examples: if a love couple sits on a bench and the partners are kissing each other, this action includes the both actors in the normative orders outspread through the Park, which are constructive elements. But it does not concern partners having sex on the bench there. Or, as you could notice on one of the pictures – the woman on the playground who is taking off her sock – this is absolutely allowed action, but if she takes off all her clothes, in this (public) space this action would be understood as breaking the “rules” of the normal practice, i.e. as breaking the order. There are many examples like these two and they point at the ‘degree of allowance of the penetration of the private (intimate) into the public’ – interweaving which are possible in the boundaries of the Park only as far as they are realized in the normal degrees.

## THE RELATION “NATURAL – SOCIAL (CULTURAL)”

How the Park has been constituted as a park is a problem that can be considered from different points of view. One aspect is the genesis of the city parks as one of the rest of the city spaces. Another aspect is the development of the park, for instance, that it is linked to the general development of the modern city as a whole.

A special interest for us is the relation between what we call ‘nature’ and what we call ‘culture’. We have reduced these terms to the following uses:

**First**, for the purposes of the project we do not make a distinction between ‘social’ and ‘cultural’ because this is not necessary for our analysis. We would like to explain more about the term ‘nature’.

**Nature** is the reality, which we see all around us in its simplicity. We own a specific sense of it, at the same time it exists in a specific way within us as human beings. However, this specific way is in accordance with the social perception of nature. It is something that we are disposed to see, imagine and conform to. As social beings we perceive as natural the things that are produced socially, i.e. that are products of the socialization, of the ‘living-together’ structures, of the social practices. These ‘things’ create the meaning of nature for

us, as far as they are part of the social world – *things that we depend on, that we deal with, which belong to us, or to which we belong.*

**We found it useful to set this accent on the problem in order to define our general thesis that in fact the Park itself is not the nature itself.** It is a tamed, socialized nature. The Park is an artificial construction, an artifact that we explain with the metaphor “*nature-born-in-the-heart-of-the-city*”. We can call the Park something like ‘*unnatural nature*’.

The Park is a space where the natural and the social correlates in a way, which the individuals accept as given. It is not necessary to separate the one from the other. If they do this, they will lose the magic of being within the boundaries of the city and at the same time beyond them. The Park is a zone of the incessant link between the individuals and the nature out of the town, between them and the city itself. This relation is implied in the free time activities – meetings, conversations, dates, walks, relaxation, games etc.

As we mentioned, the city park is artificially constructed. Every natural thing there has been developed to an artifact. Undoubtedly nature remains the basis – in the form we know it as wild nature. However the space of the Park is simply a part of the city. This fact distinguishes the Park from the nature out of the populated areas and from the city itself, because not everything in the Park is a social product. There are trees, bushes, flowers, grass, stones, water... ‘the real nature’, but it is socially maintained and controlled. It exists in the frames of a common culture, it is also aesthetic – it is not allowed to live in its natural state.

*Nature in the Park is instrumentalized.*

This anesthetizing and controlling appears according to a number of artifacts. Here we attach artifacts concerned to the ‘shaping’ of the Park space:

- Alleys
- Gardens
- Fountains and artificial lakes
- Benches
- Playgrounds
- Restaurants, bars – these are marginal
- Dog area
- Statues and sculptures
- Monuments.

All of these are the elements of constructing this space as social (or cultural). The artifacts of lightening are also included in the list.

According to this we set the following conclusion: *in the Park there is natural light together with the artificial one; the plants are artificially framed and ordered; the water is stored in artificial basins; the soil and the flowers are regularly shaped, watered, cut and dug.* The artifacts are placed in such a way that they have become an organic part of the ‘city’ nature. Here occurs the care for the nature not as nature itself, but as a part of the city. For example we observe the same care in the cases in which the officials keep the streets clean, grow more trees and grass, and provide the city lights.

**Finally, the Park as a specific city space is only a big artifact.**

The city park is projected and planned.

It has its “architects”. It is an act of planning where and how the alleys and the gardens will be placed, where the benches will be put – every single thing is arranged in advance. This makes the space of the park maximally ordered. Moreover, the order comes from the anonymous public look, which the inhabitants of the Park exercise, on themselves and on the others, is not the only one.

Another order exists and it comes from the official discourse and which we can roughly define as institutional. The power of discourse appears in the very act of giving name of the Park. During different periods the Park had been called Tzar Simeonova Gradina (Garden of Tzar Simeon), Gradska Gradina (the City Garden)... The changing of the official name as well as the changing of some memorials (the replacement of some of them that are not actual anymore, signs of the previous political regime) indicate the way the discourse functions. The discourse is supported and legitimated in the public sphere by the responsible institutions.

We should confess the ambivalence as a constitutive element of this space. Even if it consists of social orders it implies something like contra-orders. Practically in the Park somehow find place individuals who belong to the mentioned 'deviating' groups. Besides there are young people manifesting violence for example skin heads or just ordinary teenagers who have their own area of public expression. For instance, these are boys and girls who are representatives of many different subcultures (playing heck, skateboarding etc.). Another social group, which is not exclusion, are the elder retired people, who have plenty of free time. A number of practices, which are not allowed easily, find place in the Park space – smoking marijuana, drinking alcohol, and even fighting.

## PARK INHABITANTS

The inhabitants of *Tsarsieonova gradina* (*Tzar Simeon Garden*) can be arranged in following two big groups:

### **1. Real communities:**

- Teenagers who can be arranged in three subgroups:
  - Heck players, skaters, bikers etc.
  - Football fans
  - Friends and Couples – they prefer end parts of park – near the city square and the lake *Symphony*

The so-called youth subcultures here are presented from the point of view of appropriation and “uses” of certain sights and places of the Park. Such kinds of places are not the only places for them, they are not temporary communities but related by the interests and links “out of the park”. The most of their activities are connected with the sport but also with other interests.

The Central City Park or *Gradska gradina* is a space, preferred by many youth groups. Despite of a great variety of such kinds of communities in the park, there are two main places, which are appropriated in a specific way of their “inhabitants”. They are situated in the two very ends of the park, in its outskirts: The *Symphony* – a fancy café now and a kind of *Casino* in the past, the lake and – in the border of the Park with the Central City Square – thus they use both - the Main Street and the Park

Besides of the relatively permanent visitors in the park, there are young people who “use” the Park as a meeting place on the road to the concerts and football matches, techno parties, etc. from and to the Central railway station.

In general, the youth subcultures can be distinguished from the viewpoint of their musical preferences – mostly alternative music and by their dresses. The heck players, skaters



and bikers wear free and comfortable cloths, the football fans (who call themselves *football hooligans*) wear the t-shirts of their favorite football team (mostly of the two main teams of Plovdiv) and other accessories as badges, scarfs, etc. which identify them as community members.

Despite of the fact that the park is a public space and it is considered as a public, the *heck players* are thinking the place as their “own”, as belonged to them. The territory is “marked” in an imaginary way and there are rules of “use”, the place is rare used by others and it is nonverbally reserved for them.

The choice of the place – half in the park, half on the main street, at first sight that is a kind of manifestation of community and identity – all people, walking and passing on the main street can see them – they are “seen” and “heard” constantly. But behind that apparent visibility they are a closed community. They are “open” towards the people with common interests, but it is very difficult for newcomers to penetrate inside the community. They don’t “push” the new people out; they are friendly with them, but skeptical.

The group created their own rules and forms of communication and behavior, they have their own codified language and slang and they often look strange in the eyes of the others.

The play of heck, at the first sight, is the only thing that gathers them together. The game really do it but usually a great number of the members don’t participate in the game – they watch, they share the emotions and the group. The relationships between the members are not based only on the “heck”. They spend almost their entire free time together – during the weekends and till late in the evenings. Rooted in the common musical preferences in the beginning, their relationships were going deeper and they share many every-day life activities, their meeting became habitualized activities in the sense of Burger and Luckman<sup>2</sup>.

The subjects of their conversations are not for everyday topics. They prefer the topics around the music, sport, concerts, school (most of them are schoolmates and students, there are some workers too). They also prefer funny topics – urban stories, local urban news, jokes etc.

They often interact with skaters. Two years ago they had appropriated another urban place, in a different direction of the city, but the Municipal security service dispersed them.

The age is not the main constitutive factor here – the members are between 13 and 26 years old and the structure of community is not hierarchied – there have not well manifested leaders and ringleaders.

The *heck players* use the park more as a place for cultural and social communication than as “nature in the city”. Such kind of space is absolutely transparent and they can be sanctioned in any moment if they do something wrong “against the order and rules of society”.

The other youth community – the **football fans** - uses another place in the park – the space around the lake and the *Symphony*. They prefer the inner sight of the garden. Sometimes they use some “hidden” benches and the space around them for their meetings. Normally they don’t connect an exact place, considered as fixed and “reserved” and as their

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<sup>2</sup> **Berger**, Peter, Thomas Luckman 1966: the Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge. New York: Anchor Books.

own. As we mentioned above, they use the garden as a place for appointments on the road to or from the football match.

The most important base of their relationships is the feeling of strong attachment and belonging to the group. There are two main “fighting” champs – the fans of Botev and Lokomotiv Plovdiv<sup>3</sup>. The main base for constructing their sense of community is the love to the football game but beside that they created their own norms, mythology, language, shared memories and experience and they behave in the group in a way, different than with the other people and groups in the society.

Their own reflexion on a specific identity and presentation as a community and through the community can be seen in many answers from our interviews and questionnaires. Some of them are: *we are different, we are hooligans, and the society is against us*. On the other hand, from the outside point of view, the community members are recognized as asocial.

The symbols of the communities and symbolic (and not only) fights and relationships with other football fans groups:

As the most visible way of expression of their identity we can mention the accessories of the group, their own folklore and mythology. On the level of behavior, they are aggressive, they often have conflicts with the police and use alcohol in the park – something forbidden for such kind of central urban and public space.

In conclusion we can say that the heck player, the football fans and other youth groups use the park not only and not firstly as a way to be “in the nature” but as a space – opened, accessible, in the center of the city, transparent and hidden at the same time. There they can express their own collective and/or personal identity and to appropriate their own places and sight for that.

Other “inhabitants” of the park can be classified and typologied as:

- Mothers with children – this is a group that can be divided into two subgroups (*mothers* and *children*) but they do not exist separately although the communication in each of them is with its own principles. It is interesting: there cannot be constructed groups *parents with children* or *fathers with children* because there are no any fathers. Favorite places of this group are open-air playgrounds – two in the park – there are many game installations and the park staff always keeps them clean. About communication and relations in this group we can say much but they are typical of open-air playgrounds in neighborhoods in the whole city – there come mothers and children from central part of Plovdiv.

- Pensioners – they can be divided into two absolutely separated (physically and mentally) groups:

- Pensioners-men – they usually inhabit the place called *Laika*, which is symbolic for the park – this is a round space around the fountain near the City Square

- Pensioners-women – they usually inhabit the main alleys where they get together in small groups (between 2 and 5 persons). Actually this is the most walking group, they sit down on the benches only for a short rest – the conversations are kept out during the stroll. This group uses the park as an aesthetically beautiful place suitable for *free of charge* meetings. Most of ladies know each other from before – previous work, neighborhood, schoolmates etc. Relations in the group can be compared with these ones in cafes and bistros.

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<sup>3</sup> In the mount of May Locomotive Plovdiv won the National cup and now they are the champions of Bulgaria.

- Park staff – this is the group of gardeners, cleaners, municipal guards, etc. This is very important group but the park is their working place
- People with dogs – in the park walking dogs is forbidden but there is an enclosed place where dog proprietors get together. This group does not go out of this space. The identity of its members is connected with their pets – most of them are people who live near the park.
- Sculptures – they are community in the framework of the park only once in the year when there is the annual planer of local, national and international sculptures. After the end of the planer the best works remain there – on the grass plots. Now we can see more than ten – mostly in the northern part of the park, along two of the main alleys.

**2. Other types of inhabitants** (the following groups are not communities because there are no relations between their members):

- Visitors in the city – they are usually families with or without children. Their way between Central railway station and city center, where are the most of shops, leads trough the park. They use the park as place where they can eat their home-cooked meet, ice cream, hamburgers and etc., or just to relax after a long walk in the city. They prefer the main alleys of the park because they do not know the place.

- Passers – we can divide them into two groups:

- People who live or work near the park
- People who move between main toposes in central part of the city – City center, Central post office, universities (*University of Plovdiv* and *Technical university*), Central railway station, etc.

They use the main alleys and this makes a big stream of people there. In that sense we consider the main alleys as transitory space

- Dating unknown persons – there are a place in the park (in Plovdiv it called *The Bear* - it is a sculpture of a bear near a small lake), which is symbolical for the park, and all people in the city know it. People who have met each other by Internet or newspapers arrange their dates there because there are not many people and they can recognize each other. This place is a public but it is not public so much as the Central square in front of Central post office (one of the urban places, considered as a dating place). Who knows, may be awaited person is not fit to be seen.

- Unemployed people – They use the park as a place where they can read at ease newspapers with advertisements and then they can get to the post office for a call.

- Foreign tourists – they come in the park because it is one of the most beautiful and central places in Plovdiv. They do not know about it before pass by the park because Plovdiv tour operators do not include the park in the tourist routes.

- Jogging people – they live near the park and this is the most suitable place for jogging. They can be seen either early in the morning or late in the evening.

Our last case of ‘appropriation’ of one of the places in the park, creation of community and establishment of a tradition is the most significant group around on one of the most significant place.

## High Park

This is *The Second Parliament, The parliament of Plovdiv*, as pensioners say. You can find them there always when the weather is good – when it is rain they move into the foyer of The Central City Post office that is near the park. Anybody can say since when this place exists as a topos in the city space but the traditionalism is obvious. Actually there do not come only pensioners but and *all loafers from Plovdiv* as the words of them. They define their place as reserved only for them – the place is in the most eastern end of the park, very close to the Central City square, and consists of some benches, arranged in circle, with a fountain in the middle. In the past that was the place where poor strata of the Plovdiv society had a fun – there were a dancing floor and an orchestra pit – only on Saturdays of course.

On principle in the end parts of the park get together these groups, which want to be seen and use the park for social contacts and manifestation. The round shape of the pensioners' space is not accident – on the one hand it is a necessity – to facilitate the contact. On the other hand – the benches physically enclose the place and isolated it from the other part of the park.

So called in Plovdiv *Laika*<sup>4</sup> (or *Laikuchka*) is a typical city male space by tradition of the forum in Ancient Greece where the communication is absolutely constructed and goes under certain rules. The name is not connected neither with the herb nor with the dog breed but comes from Bulgarian word *laya*<sup>5</sup> which in old slang means *scold, bawl*. There come only men, the subjects of their conversations are social important and they think it is inaccessible for the women and its discussion is crucial and needed. It is important to differentiate this space from the pub that is a male space too but it is not connected only with the city and there the principles of the communication are different and not so much formalized as there.

The borders of this space change in the time. Before 1989 the men told only about football because of tabooing of the subject “politics”. In Plovdiv there were always two big football teams (*Botev Plovdiv* and *Lokomotiv Plovdiv*) and their fans were opponents – the eternal argument between them kept their persistence to come there and join in life of the place. The adherence to one of two teams was destining for identity of the inhabitants of this place although all of them knew everything about everyone – about their life and work, their families, their daily round. Today is the same but the football is replaces by the current political and social problems in Plovdiv and Bulgaria. The new identity of the *eternal opponents* is defined by their adherence to big Bulgarian parties which until recently were two (*United Democratic Forces* and *Bulgarian Socialistic Party*) and now they are three (plus *National Movement Simeon II*).

Why *eternal opponents* – the argument is what constructs the interrelations in this space. And the argument has its own rules and mechanism. Each of the groups has informal leader whose position is constructed to such a degree that within the framework of this space is impossible to have a long conversation with some other member because the leader immediately replaces him. Only the leader has rights to inform, to have an opinion, etc. – and he expresses that in behalf of whole group, often in behalf of whole community.

The mechanism of the argument is as follows – the opponents are separated in two groups (between 5 and 10 persons), the others are spectators. Every group unwittingly

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<sup>4</sup> *Laika* – the name of a herb (*comomile*) and of a dog breed; *Laikuchka* – the dialect analog of *Laika*

<sup>5</sup> *Laya* – in Bulgarian it means *bark*

detaches a spokesman – the first is never the leader of the group – he joins in the hottest moment when his side needs not only substantial reasons but also a dignified leader. Second orator *limbers up* joining the argument before first one goes to finish his reasons – in beginning they speak together and then the second spokesman completely replaces the first one. In the opponents camp the situation is the same. In this way the argument comes to its height when it is time of the leaders – then everything goes down quickly. Furthermore all the time the real participants are standing. A necessary condition for starting the argument is the fact that all men, before come there, have read whole national and local press. They can do that in the Public library *Ivan Vazov*, near the park – there they use a reduction of price – 2 instead of 10 levas for a year.

Of course except the arguments there are also normal conversation, which are about the daily round and memories of inhabitants, but they are not important for the analysis of this space because they are typical of gardens in neighborhood, pub and queue in shop.

The members of this community are absolutely different in their profession, education, residence, birthplace, etc. There get together doctors and builders, university educated and uneducated people (for example – the leader of the group of the *National Movement Simeon II* is a turner); and does not influence on the hierarchy of groups and community. The initial expectations most of men to be from Plovdiv did not come true, in the opposite – most of them are from different Bulgarian villages. But that is typical of the totalitarianism when the peasants come to the cities to work in new factories – this, in one hand, changed the town but, on the other, included the coming masses in established borders of the city and they derived its images and toposes. It has not happened only to the *Laika* but and to the whole *Tsarsimeonova gradina*<sup>6</sup>, which in that time was known as *Gradska gradina*<sup>7</sup>. To come people from all parts of Plovdiv helps the fact that the town is not too large and that the pensioners use big reductions in city transport.

These differences are not a cause for division – everybody knows them but they are not realized in usual way – in the opposite – they are a cause for requiring of opinion on some problems from *the most competent* person; i.e. in this case the difference is an welcome variety. But this variety is in fixed borders – age and sexual. The interviewed say that there come only women *who have gone off their heads*. There is not a practice to expel someone, there are not unwelcome guests – each public is desired but anyone cannot occupy their place because there is not in Plovdiv such big community. And most people do not want to enter in the space, which is not only a place for social contacts but for manifestation.

The manifestation is what defines the leaders – they are the best orators – and this is typical of place like this since Antiquity. All that is a reason for the following conclusion – *Laika* is a public space but its publicity is limited to a certain extent because of the mentioned reasons – so this space remains on the borderline between the public and the private (because of the relative freedom of manifestation). In spite of that it is less private than the other spaces in the park because of the constructed relations.

Why this community has find its space right there, in that park – actually that is not connected with the nature – in other Bulgarian towns space like this is situated on the square or other central place but not in the park. Possibly the nearness to the city center and the shape of the place is more important. This is the one community of the park, which in winter just moves elsewhere but does not disintegrate.

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<sup>6</sup> Tsarsimeonova gradina – Garden of Czar Simeon

<sup>7</sup> Gradska gradina – City Garden

But in warm mounts this community is inseparable part of the park. Furthermore – it is the most constant and the biggest community, with the longest tradition – so it is necessary to analyze it in details. On the other hand this community can be compared with the skaters, for example, who inhabit in the opposite part of the park but they also use it as a place for manifestation and social contacts (in this case it is a competition) and are not interested of the nature. They use park as a combination of artifacts, just like pensioners and loafers.

#### CONCLUSIONS:

The park has been always a significant for any city urban space. There are not parks in the villages. The concept and idea of the park in the villages does not exist. Even during the socialism, when many parks in the villages were created they were constructed and designed just like in the city.

Any city has it's own park and vice versa. Despite the common idea for the park as a humanized natural place or nature in the city, the meanings and significant of the parks are given by the inhabitants.

The park is a transparent and free access space: transparent and free because the “eye” of the power, because of the artificial lights on one hand and - of the public norm, on the other.

The park form anthropological point of view is an ambivalent space. The interrelations between social, cultural and natural always put the stress on the tension and dominations of different concepts and perceptions for the park – more as a nature or as more as an artifact. An artifact as the city is or nature as the men see it – aesthetic.

The research of the “uses” of the park and its “inhabitants” is a research of it eternal tension between the dichotomies and takes down the doubts coming form the attempts to define a park as one or as another.

The cases that we presented in the report can be multiply in a comparative perspective which can allow us thought the “possible” uses and appropriations of the park or through the different discourses to try to say something about our own societies.

Everybody has his own park, one can say in the plan of the personal memories; everybody has its own ‘park experience’. The park educates the city dwellers in urban way of life and the city dwellers multiply the park in the neighborhoods, balconies, yards and etc.

The aspect stayed out of the report was the aspect of the Park as a place of the collective memory, but some memorial sights are presented on the CD.

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